



PHILIPPINE NORMAL UNIVERSITY

The National Center for Teacher Education

POLICY BRIEF SERIES

VOLUME 7 | ISSUE 5 | 2023

PRINT ISSN: 2984-9063

ONLINE ISSN: 2984-9071

Aligning the K to 12 Curriculum with Industry Expectations in Relation to Factors Affecting Senior High School Strand Choice

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As industry found K-12 graduates unprepared for real-life job expectations and left most of them unhired after high school graduation, the Department of Education found it imperative to review the entire curriculum. Various studies looked at the different aspects of the K-12 curriculum including its implementation, factors affecting senior high school (SHS) strand choice, and the competencies of its graduates. One of the major findings arising from research is that parental influence is a major factor in SHS strand choice as parents have expectations regarding their children's future monthly income. Thus, this policy brief seeks to help align K-12 graduates' characteristics with that of industry by primarily recommending a school-industry co-crafted entry level job position with a monthly salary of at least ₱20,000 as preferred by most parents for their children, among other suggested policies and practices in the education sector. This will help ensure that high school graduates from low-income families can work right away to address intergenerational family poverty.

Recommended Citation:

Miranda, P.A. (2023). Aligning the K to 12 Curriculum with Industry Expectations in Relation to Factors Affecting Senior High School Strand Choice. *Policy Brief Series 7(5)*, pp. 1-5. Philippine Normal University Educational Policy Research and Development Center.



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The questionability of the employability of K-12 graduates came about as a result of the Commission on Human Rights' report that the "pandemic generation" was having a hard time landing a job (Bautista, 2023). A 2018 analysis by the Philippine Business for Education (PBE) found that though most learners were equipped with the necessary competencies that are needed by industries, only a small percentage of industry were keen on hiring senior high school (SHS) graduates (Corrales, 2022). Also, most SHS graduates preferred to go to college, according to a 2020 research by the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS) on their employability (Corrales, 2022). Hence, the Department of Education is currently undergoing a review of the K-12 curriculum with other education advocates and industry institutions to address the skills mismatch among SHS graduates.

Studies on the Implementation of the K-12

At the onset of the K-12 curriculum's implementation, Ducanes and Ocampo's (2020) research revealed that the SHS program resulted in an increase in overall school participation rate among 16 to 17-year-olds, most especially among female students. Their study also showed that most of the gains in school participation were also found to occur outside NCR.

In terms of reviewing the K-12 curriculum's competencies, Almerino, Jr. et al. (2020) focused on measuring the competencies of learners in STEM, ABM, HUMSS, GAS and TVL, specifically the subsets of nonverbal reasoning (NV), quantitative reasoning (QR), reading vocabulary (RV), reading comprehension (RC), mathematical capacity (MC), and mathematical applications (MA). Results showed that the STEM and ABM groups had above-average scores in most of the subtests, while HUMSS and the GAS groups obtained average scores in most of the subtests. The TVL group, however, garnered below-average scores in most of the subtests.

As pertains to the sports track, the participants in Poblador and Tagare's (2023) study stated the practical aspect of the track as it employs situational-based learning wherein they are able to obtain skills that are applicable in real life. Their research also emphasized the significance of the necessity to form an environment that facilitates professional growth, which includes institutional support for training and other relevant physical activity needed for sports skills enhancement. It is also interesting to note that students in the sports track program revealed multiple intelligences, with much highlight on kinesthetic intelligence (Poblador & Tagare 2023).

On SHS Tracks/Strands, Employability, and College Pursuance

There are many factors that affect students' choices of SHS track/strand (Nazareno et al., 2021; Rio et al., 2022). Personal preference and parent's influence are revealed to be essential variables. Socio-demographic categories such as sex, age and family wealth also factor in (Nazareno et al., 2021; Rio et al., 2022). Scholarships help students who need to reduce their financial challenges. Peers or friends are also influential in shaping the aspirations of learners (Rio et al., 2022).

From the perspective of students, Brillantes et al. (2019) unearthed that the students found the SHS program a "culture shock." This is because of the college-level subjects and workload. Another key finding is that many learners stated that Grade 11 is mostly composed of lectures, and Grade 12 mostly of reporting. Specific subjects that are not their major subjects such as practical research, philosophy and pre-calculus were found by the learners as difficult subjects. Furthermore, students in the arts and design and sports found it difficult to find a balance between their academic tasks and sport or art practices. They also articulated the need for opportunities to be engaged in performances, exhibits and competitions (Brillantes et al., 2019).

One of the key findings of Nacorda et al. (2019) is the existing level of difficulty in the provision of skills that are required by industries due to deficiency of infrastructure that can support Hands-on Learning. Concomitant to this is the lack of financial support for human capital investment and the necessary facilities that are needed for workshop rooms or laboratories. The authors also found that the on-the-job training (OJT) of students from public schools are also not well supported by the business sector. Moreover, the congested curriculum (Estrera, 2020) left little time for hands-on learning endeavors, and there were assessment problems in terms of the level of effectiveness of the entire senior high school program (Nacorda et al., 2019).

It is essential to note the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and Department of Education's (DepEd) (2019) study on the youth sector in relation to the labor market or the Youth Education Investment and Labor Market Outcomes (YEILMOS), wherein it unearthed that parental expectations of the occupational preferences and salary of their children factored a lot in terms of what the learner would choose for their SHS strand. In particular, parents want their child to work in urban areas and expect their child's minimum monthly salary to be approximately in the ₱20,000–₱30,000 range.



This necessitates a challenge for both the education sector and industry to co-craft entry level job positions across SHS tracks that are quite the equivalent of the preferred minimum range expected by parents. Otherwise, parents would opt that their child pursue college to be able to obtain such minimum salary range or work abroad instead. Most Filipino parents have control over their children's career trajectory since they fund their children's education and as such, parents are expecting a good return of investment (as business parlance would put it). Insights and ideas from work-based learning (Veal & Dunbar, 2018) and job-embedded learning (Taylor, n.d.) can aid in co-crafting entry level job positions across SHS strands in relation to regional wage board suggestions, industry wage organizations' recommendations, and the National Economic and Development Authority's (NEDA) assessments. Also, the government should create initiatives for the private sector to invite learners for hands-on learning workshops or on-the-job training sessions and incentives in relation to the future hiring of a SHS graduate (Abragan et al., 2022).

Benoza and Palaoag's (2023) research which explored the alignment of the SHS strand with the college program of choice showed that the SHS strand prepared students well for college because it helped develop self-regulation. Moreover, graduates of SHS' academic STEM program were found to be more prepared to enroll and succeed in the nursing program.

Recommendations for Policy and Practice

Co-crafting entry level job positions is part and parcel of the need for location-specific co-created curriculum by school and industry, as integral to local and regional development initiatives in relation to national human resources planning (Miranda, 2023). Human resources planning is greatly linked with a country's strategic industrialization plan (Miranda, Jr., 1994). A strategic industrialization plan creates job opportunities in the country and thus reduces brain drain. A co-crafted entry level job position must take into consideration parental influence for their children to earn within the range of ₱20,000–₱30,000 a month (ADB & DepEd, 2019). This means that a SHS graduate must possess the skill set or "skills basket" for an actual entry level position in industry that is worth ₱20,000 at the very least. Only a co-crafted entry level job position created by school and industry (based on a co-created curriculum) can address this. Otherwise, parents will advise their children to go abroad for better income or pursue college instead. This is to highlight the main idea of adding the 2 years to the old K-10 curriculum – so that high school graduates from low income families can work right away and help address intergenerational family poverty.

This will be very beneficial and advantageous to the Philippine economy in the long run.

Concomitant to this is the need for a long-term inter-agency collaboration among DepEd, CHED, TESDA, and PRC as well as other related government institutions to ensure the alignment of specific skills requirements of each SHS track with those who are preparing to become SHS teachers and/or as part of the upskilling of existing SHS teachers (Uy & Martinez, 2019). Training future SHS teachers entails the provision of workshop areas, equipment, and laboratories in teacher education institutions (TEIs) to simulate actual industry setting. Thus, targeted government funding for TEIs as well as SHS schools in terms of the creation of industry simulation facilities or infrastructure is necessary. The private sector can assist in this endeavor through public-private partnerships with both TEIs and SHS schools.

The government can also consider promoting disciplines that may not be the current fad but are essential to more socially-inclusive economic development and sustainability (e.g., agri-fishery arts and food security) (Uy & Martinez, 2019).

It is also important to promote the creative industry and the existing certification given by TESDA for its related courses (e.g., 2D animation, 3D animation, Game Art Development, etc.) that are recognized both in the local and global level (Asis, 2020) since the creative industry is a large part of the success and development of the Silicon Valley in California (and its counterpart in India and other areas of Asia and the rest of the world) that spurred regional development. The potential of the youth who are not in employment, education or training (NEET) as suggested by Orbeta, Jr. et al. (2021) can be looked into in terms of the youth NEET's TVET capacities and capability to work in a creative industry setting.

A similar co-created curriculum by the school and government can be undertaken to align civil service requirements with the skills basket of each SHS strand so that SHS graduates can work in government agencies, government owned and controlled corporations (GOCCs), other related government institutions and quasi-government entities upon high school graduation. This would also entail a re-examination of the government's Salary Standardization Law (SSL) in relation to the said co-created curriculum among other economic factors (e.g., inflation, monetary and fiscal policies, micro and macro market patterns and shifts).

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3. Develop and disseminate the University research agenda
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5. Manage University's research production particularly the conduct of educational policy studies in education and teacher education; and
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